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POEMS

SEPHINE DASKAM





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POEMS

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JOSEPHINE

DASKAM

POEMS

BY

JOSEPHINE DASKAM



NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

MDCCCCIII

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TO
M. A. J.,

*the first and cordial critic of many of these verses,
it gives me great pleasure to dedicate this collection
of them.*

J. D. B.

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MOTHERHOOD

THE night throbs on: but let me pray, dear Lord!
Crush off his name a moment from my mouth.
To thee my eyes would turn, but they go back,
Back to my arm beside me where he lay—
So little, Lord, so little and so warm!

I cannot think that thou hadst need of him!
He is so little, Lord, he cannot sing,
He cannot praise thee; all his lips had learned
Was to hold fast my kisses in the night.

Give him to me—he is not happy there!
He had not felt his life: his lovely eyes
Just knew me for his mother, and he died.

Hast thou an angel there to mother him?
I say he loves me best—if he forgets,
If thou allow it that my child forgets
And runs not out to meet me when I come—

What are my curses to thee? Thou hast heard
The curse of Abel's mother, and since then
We have not ceased to threaten at thy throne,
To threat and pray thee that thou hold them still
In memory of us.

M O T H E R H O O D

See thou tend him well,
Thou God of all the mothers! If he lack
One of his kisses—Ah, my heart, my heart,
Do angels kiss in heaven? Give him back!

Forgive me, Lord, but I am sick with grief,
And tired of tears and cold to comforting.
Thou art wise I know, and tender, aye, and good.
Thou hast my child and he is safe in thee,
And I believe—

Ah, God, my child shall go
Orphaned among the angels! All alone,
So little and alone! He knows not thee,
He only knows his mother—give him back!

THE SLEEPY SONG

As soon as the fire burns red and low,
And the house up-stairs is still,
She sings me a queer little sleepy song,
Of sheep that go over the hill.

The good little sheep run quick and soft,
Their colors are gray and white:
They follow their leader nose to tail,
For they must be home by night.

And one slips over and one comes next,
And one runs after behind,
The gray one's nose at the white one's tail,
The top of the hill they find.

And when they get to the top of the hill
They quietly slip away,
But one runs over and one comes next—
Their colors are white and gray.

And over they go, and over they go,
And over the top of the hill,
The good little sheep run quick and soft,
And the house up-stairs is still.

THE SLEEPY SONG

And one slips over and one comes next,
The good little, gray little sheep!
I watch how the fire burns red and low,
And she says that I fall asleep.

THE GOLDEN DAYS

I WONDER where the Fairy-book can be,
The book from which she read to you and me,
While the warm sunlight shifted down the tree?

*And the brown eyes turned downward to the leaf,
Tear-spotted by two tiny people's grief,
When Death bound one more princess in his sheaf.*

I wonder where the Rocking-horse has run
That carried us before the day was done,
To all the lands that lie beneath the sun?

*And the dear lips of her we loved so well
Kissed us more sweetly than our tongue could tell,
When the too daring riders swayed and fell.*

I wonder where the crimson peaches grow
We caught together when she threw them, so,
And ran with her to hide them, laughing low?

*And her light feet were swifter yet than ours,
And her soft cheeks were like two rosy flowers—
Ah, Time and Death, ye two malignant powers!*

THE VIGIL

NAY, Lord, I pray thee call not me to fight!
I have crept out of day to bless the night.
Hush, Son, and gather courage for the light!

But see, I weary ere I have begun!
Give thou the battle to some worthier one!
When have I offered thee to choose, my Son?

Look how my eyes with loneliness are wet!
But give me once warm arms and lips close met.
Into the desert, Son, thy way is set!

Nay, then, thou leanest on a broken reed!
Music and mirth and fire and friends I need.
They walk alone whom I have called to lead!

How shall I lead who only know to stray?
Am I to shepherd them, who lose the way?
Yet I require them of thee in that day!

What if I will not? Let me be as these
That laugh and breed and die and have good ease!
Nay, Son, the eye once bared forever sees!

.

THE VIGIL

This only, Lord: what shall my gladness be
Who fight disheartened in life's phantom sea?
To make the bridge whereon they cross to me!

What am I, Lord, that I should strive with fate?
Bring on the dawn, before it be too late!
My Son, the dawn shall come, and thou wilt wait!

.

Yea, Lord, and I lie broken in thy hand.
Heat me white hot, to forge as thou hast planned.
Fear not, my Son, but I shall understand!

Melt out my yielded soul in one red stream,
Perchance through thy white furnace hope may
gleam—
My Son, a rest thou hast not dared to dream!

THE SEA MAN

IT was the burgher's daughter,
As fair as maid could be,
That loved too well the stranger,
A man from off the sea.

*"My mother she was a sea maid;
My father he loved no shore.
Thou must bury me under billows,
Or thou ne'er shalt see me more!"*

She's kissed him lip and forehead;
She's given him her vow:
"Five-fathom sea shall cover thee,
But only love me now!"

.

For seven years her sleep is sweet
Against the sea man's heart.
"But now hath come my time to die,
And now we twain must part.

"Farewell, my little daughter!
Farewell, my bonny son!
Last night the waves did call my name;
My life on land is done."

THE SEA MAN

She holds him close and closer;
The bitter tears fall down.
“Remember now thy maiden vow,
Or woe betide this town!

*“Remember the oath ye gave me,
Nor bury me but in sea,
For the ocean will come to seek its own
If ye cheat my waves of me!”*

Now come her haughty sisters;
Now comes her father stern.
“This deed brings little honor
For all the world to learn.

“Our fathers lie in holy ground;
Their tombs are carven well;
A heathen stranger cast a-sea
Were too much shame to tell!”

They’ve buried him in the minster high
That stands beside her door,
But the winds o’ the air have drowned the
prayer,
And the sea foams up the shore.

.

THE SEA MAN

“Mother, I hear the billows roll,
I hear them hiss and moan!”
“Nay, little son, their fury’s done,
’Tis but the wind alone.”

“Mother, I smell the salt sea wind,
I taste the salt sea spray!”
“Nay, daughter mine, some dream is thine,
I’ll sing thy fear away.”

“Mother, we cannot hear thy voice!
The sea rolls loud and high!
It rushes up the minster street
And flings the church door by!”

The waves pour out the windows wide,
They’ve washed the altar bare,
They’ve torn the flowers from the stranger’s
tomb,
And heaped wet sea-weed there!

.

It was the burgher’s daughter
That made her prayer in vain,
For all that drownèd city
Was never seen again.

THE SEA MAN

For all its goodly gardens,
For all its towers so high,
Five-fathom sea rolls over it
And shuts it from the sky.

*Then bury the sea man deeply,
Five fathom out from shore,
Lest the ocean come in to find him,
And ye see the sun no more!*

THE SONS OF SLEEP

Now the wayfaring, now the restless earth,
Descrying on her dim and trackless verge
The dear, awaited dawning of the night,
Moves slowly in a languor of desire,
And drifts into the haven of her sleep.

Like dropping of the sweet and gradual rain,
Full flooding all the parchèd doors of growth,
The multitudinous lips of all the flowers,
The whispering insistence of dry leaves,
All cool and rill-like flowing, falls our sleep.

As the long thunderous surge of ocean waves
That lull eternally the listening shore,
Slow sweeping in from vast and caverned depths,
Comes the white tide that washes loose our souls,
To drown them tenderly in depths of sleep.

Soft stealing like the swathed and plumèd dusk,
Enwrapped in shadows, shod with silences,
Unceasing, unresisted, unobserved,
Embosoming the lapsed and languid earth,
Slips o'er the sons of men close-feathered sleep.

By day they walk diverse and isolate,
Sunken in self they skulk their separate ways,

THE SONS OF SLEEP

Poor fugitives of fate, awhirl in time,
Groping for fellow-hands they dare not grasp,
Grudging the thriftless hours they yield to sleep.

But now, relaxed and drifting with that stream
Whereon they taste soft moments of the voyage
Whose unknown port no seaman of us all
Evaded ever, these swift, swarming souls
As one glad band of brothers sink in sleep.

Surely the great and tireless Heart of all,
Grievèd by day for their perversity,
Joys in them as they lie, breast soft on breast,
Hand locked in hand, a fathom deep in dreams,
And brims anew the cooling wells of sleep!

FOUR SONGS

I. THE PEASANT GIRL

BEYOND the sea he goes, beyond the sea.
Does he look back to Arcady and me?
And yet, how could it be?
How should he mate with such a maid as I?
Ah, let him go—good-by!

Beyond my sight he goes, beyond my sight.
Does he look back and say, "My sweet, good-night"?
And yet, is love so light?
How should he know the pain I could not tell?
Ah, let him go—farewell!

Beyond my prayer he goes, beyond my prayer.
Does he look back from out the great world there?
And yet, how could I dare?
How should he know if love be wrong or right?
Ah, let him go—good-night!

II. AN INTERLUDE

I WAS within her heart that one short year
(But that is long ago and far away!).

Her soul's sweet spring,
The while she waited for that greater thing,
Should blow to blossom all the buds of May.

I was within her heart that one short year
(But that is hidden, lost, and gone away!).

She was not mine,
But ere the glorious harvest moon could shine
There beamed on me the crescent moon of May.

I was within her heart that one short year
(But that has faded faint and soft away!).

Though the year's night
Draws on, and all about the snow falls white,
Across my heart there blows a breath of May.

III. HEART'S SEASONS

WHEN Love went holidaying
Among the autumn leaves,
They bloomed in sweet betraying,
The purple clouds, soft straying,
Held daylight back, delaying
To gild the glowing sheaves—
When Love went holidaying
Among the autumn leaves.

When Grief came on a-sighing
Behind the flowers of spring,
They withered to their dying,
The homing birds, slow flying,
Sang wintry songs, denying
The joy that June should bring—
When Grief came on a-sighing
Behind the flowers of spring.

IV. OVER THE HILLS AND FAR AWAY

“OVER the hills,” he said, “and far away!”

Ah me! to go, to leave it all and go!
To toss my life as east wind tosses spray,
To clean forget that this land ever lay
Within my sight, that wearied of it so!

“Over the hills,” he said, “and far away!”

Could he have felt my heart leap up and sing!
I knew the primrose path my feet would stray,
I guessed the lovely glow of the new day
That lies beyond the mountain’s purple wing.

“Over the hills,” he said, “and far away!”

He took my heart and wandered on alone;
Doubtless some other strolls with him to-day,
A lightsome comrade on his happy way,
That way across the hills I have not known!

THE SAILOR'S SONG

O THE wind's to the West and the sails are filling free!
Take your head from my breast: you must say good-by
to me.

You'd my heart in both your hands, but you did not
hold it fast,
And the mill cannot grind with the water that is past.

O it's I must away, and it's you must bide at home!
I am sped like the spray, I am fickle as the foam:
It was sweet, my dear, 't was sweet, but 't was all too
sweet to last,
For the mill cannot grind with the water that is past.

We have clasped, we have kissed, but you would not
give me more:
I must win what we missed on some other, farther
shore.
You can never hold the gray gull that swings about
the mast,
And the mill cannot grind with the water that is past.

You will mourn, you will mate, but 't will never be
with me:
I am off to my fate, and it lies across the sea.
For it's God alone that knows where my anchor will
be cast,
And the mill cannot grind with the water that is past.

QUATRAIN

IN a wide chamber from the rest apart,
I spread the purple daïs of my heart:
An unfilled throne, with steps by men untrod,
Too high it was for them—too low for God.

THE OLD COUNTRY

WHERE 's *the land o' Dreamland?*

How should I know?
On the moon's farther side,
Where the drift clouds ride,
And the stars hang low.

What 's the look o' Dreamland?

How should I see?
All the air's silver-gray,
Glinted with star spray,
Here and there a tree.

What 's the sound o' Dreamland?

How should I hear?
Bell tones from far below,
Night's haunting cockcrow,
Olden songs and dear.

What 's the speech o' Dreamland?

How should I say?
Great eyes that fill the heart,
Soft hands that clasp and part,
Calls from far away.

THE OLD COUNTRY

Where 's the gate o' Dreamland?

How should I tell?

Sudden you stand before,

Slip through the quiet door—

Ah, but all 's well!

THE LITTLE BLIND BEGGAR

At the gate of the world where the travel flows,
And the folk stream by full-tide,
A little blind Beggar sits in the sun
And shoots afar and awide.

He fits the arrow and twangs the bow
And low in his throat laughs he,
For well he knows he will hit his mark
Though never a face he see.

And never his stock of arrows fails,
For the pain of the wound is sweet,
And the stricken folk bring the arrows back
To pile at the Beggar's feet.

So he fits the arrows and twangs the bow,
And laughs till his fingers shake,
For well he knows he can never miss,
But somewhere a heart must ache.

Now they who are struck, they keep still tongue,
But they carry the arrows back,
And they who are spared they sound abroad
The songs of the pain they lack.

THE LITTLE BLIND BEGGAR

But still or singing, and grave or gay,
Through the gate of the world they go,
And the little blind Beggar sits in the sun
And laughs as he lays them low.

THE STRANGER CHILD

Now the night is dark,
Now the house is still;
Comes a little stranger child
Toiling up the hill.

Listens at the door,
Peers within the pane,
Reaches for the broken latch
Rusted with the rain.

Murmurs in the dark,
Sobs beneath his breath,
Whispers to the empty rooms,
Quiet, now, for death.

Wanders through the lane
Where the rosebush grew,
Tries to reach the cobwebbed sill
Drenched and dark with dew.

Calls—and calls in vain!
For the man, alone,
Dies before a dying fire,
Hears no human tone

THE STRANGER CHILD

Only his soul's voice
Calls the dull roll through;
Good so often long to wait,
Ill so quick to do.

Only his soul's eyes,
Shamed and tired of all,
Watch the red life ebb and flow,
Watch the last sands fall.

And the little child,
Clinging to the sill,
Weeps and stretches tiny hands,
Weak for good or ill.

Slow the dying coal
Drops from out the fire;
Slowly sinks the house of clay,
Empty of desire.

Through the creaking blind
Slips the spirit now,
Shudders at the stranger child,
"Thou? my lost youth, *thou?*"

SONGS OF ISEULT DESERTED

I

I do not pray for thee, most dear of all,
That ever in soft ways thy feet may fall,
For well I know that wheresoe'er thou art
Thy feet must tread forever on my heart!

I pray thee only to walk gently, sweet,
Nor press too sharply with too cruel feet:
Remember thou how soft the way must be,
How soft—and ah, how sad—and pity me!

II

Should we have loved if we had known
That love would bring one day such pain?
I cannot tell—I only kiss
The pillow where your head has lain.

Should we have loved if we had known
That love would go to come no more?
I cannot tell—I only stand
And sob before a fast-closed door.

SONGS OF ISEULT DESERTED

III

Since you are gone, all dull my life has grown,
Idle among my empty days I stand:
They pass and pass, and leave me here alone—
Ah, sweet, your hand that burned upon my hand!

Since you are gone, gone are the joys I knew,
Slowly from out the sky the long night slips:
And my arms ache with emptiness of you—
Ah, sweet, your lips that trembled on my lips!

Since you are gone, the world is grown too wide,
With cruel miles that hold us two apart:
I sit and watch the white road weary-eyed—
Ah, sweet, your heart that beat against my heart!

THE OLD CAPTIVE

To hear once more the thunder of the surf,
To breathe once more the salt and stinging wind,
To set my cheek once more against the wave,
To look once more across the billowy Sea!

Chained in the pen of silent heavy hills,
I dream hot nights of that sweet long ago,
When I leaped down the beach in the dim dawn,
And plunged to meet the sun—and knew the Sea!

*And they drove in the boats with a shout and a song,
And they spread wide the nets in the face o' the wind,
And the ship strained and dipped like a swooping bird,
And we rushed onward, mad for the open Sea!*

Never to feed my eyes on strange dim coasts,
Never to touch a branch washed in by the tide,
Never to gaze on dark and silent men
From some far isle in the mysterious Sea!

Never to see the white sails gleam and fade,
Nor watch black masts against the setting sun,
Never to glide within some wondrous port,
Nor breathe spice winds blown soft across the Sea!

THE OLD CAPTIVE

Never to feel the great sail fill and stretch,
Nor plough white fiery trails beneath the stars,
Nor float below some tow'ring rosy berg,
Nor ride the sheer gulfs of the stormy Sea!

*And they rushed down to the beach to drag us in,
And they pulled hard at the rough and glistening rope,
And the glad keel rubbed harsh on the shelly sand,
And their arms strained us, home from the terrible Sea!*

Though in my life I lost thee, tired and dead,
Me they shall bring to thee, O long desired!
Me they shall lay at sunset on the sand,
Where the strong tide swings outward to the Sea.

Me like a cradled child the waves shall rock,
Rock 'neath the moon, and sink to those dim caves,
Those wide green glooms, those clear and pallid depths,
The silence and the strange flowers of the Sea.

*And they shall bear me down with a glorious song,
And they shall shout to the crash and boom of the surf,
And they shall thrill to the whip and sting of the spray,
While the great waves ride triumphing out to Sea!*

Where the pale light strains down through undreamed
deeps
To glimmer o'er the vast unpeopled plains,

THE OLD CAPTIVE

The ancient treasure piles of dead kings' fleets,
The mighty bones long bleached beneath the Sea,

There where cool corals and still seaweeds twine,
There on the solemn level ocean floor,
Till God's great arm shall terribly plough the deep,
I shall lie long and rest beneath the Sea.

SONG TO OPHELIA

U_NTO thy grass-hidden charms
Nature worketh no alarms;
Changeth all thy breath to dew,
And thine eyes to violets blue,
Weaveth all thy waving hair
Into beams to light the air!
Thus the song—and yet he saith
“Ah! how sad a thing is Death!”

Over thy earth-covered breast
Springtime snow doth lightly rest;
Never hath been spun a sheet
For thy purity more meet;
Lovelier the earth shall be
Now that it doth prison thee!
Thus the song—and yet he saith
“Ah! how sad a thing is Death!”

A CHRISTMAS HYMN FOR CHILDREN

OUR bells ring out to all the earth,
In excelsis gloria!
But none for Thee made chimes of mirth
On that great morning of Thy birth.

Our coats they lack not silk nor fur,
In excelsis gloria!
Not such Thy Blessed Mother's were;
Full simple garments covered Her.

Our churches rise up goodly high,
In excelsis gloria!
Low in a stall Thyself did lie,
With hornèd oxen standing by.

Incense we breathe and scent of wine,
In excelsis gloria!
Around Thee rose the breath of kine,
Thy only drink Her breast divine.

We take us to a happy tree,
In excelsis gloria!
The seed was sown that day for Thee
That blossomed but at Calvary.

A CHRISTMAS HYMN

Teach us to feed Thy poor with meat,

In excelsis gloria!

Who turnest not when we entreat,

Who givest us Thy Bread to eat.

Amen.

THE GYPSY MAID

SHE met them on the forest edge,
A maid all brown and slim,
She beckoned them to leave the path
That girt the forest rim.

At first they shake their heads at her,
At last they follow meek,
She smiles at them with crimson lips,
And sweet her bright eyes speak.

They go as in a faëry dream,
The forest shuts them round,
Save for the leaves that whisper low
They hear no earthly sound.

The quiet miles have grown to leagues,
The trees are strange and tall,
They listen for the gypsy's steps
And follow where they fall.

She sings a song of Wander-land,
For very joy they weep:
Adown the hills the dying day
Soft like a cloud doth creep.

THE GYPSY MAID

The forest folk have gone to rest,
The trees are dark and high:
The gypsy's song it crooneth soft
Their mother's lullaby.

A misty moon now rides the clouds,
They sink in happy sleep:
The gypsy laughing low at them
Slips in the forest deep.

They wake into a fearsome dawn,
Lost in a gloomy fen:
They follow no more gypsy maids
In all their life again.

THREE SONGS

I. THE SAILOR

You hold me for a day, my dear,
I lose you for a life,
And that's the sailor's way, my dear,
A love, but not a wife.
'T is never I will blame you,
'T is not my eyes are wet,
But 't is I that must remember—
'T is you that will forget.

You kiss me for a night, my dear,
I kiss you for the years,
And that's the sailor's right, my dear,
And life's too short for tears.
'T is never I will stay you
When once the moon has set,
But 't is I that must remember—
'T is you that will forget.

II. THE HUNTER

ONE came chasing the fallow deer
When all the wood was green,
But through my heart an arrow went
That ne'er by him was seen—
Ah me!
That ne'er by him was seen.

One came hunting the eagle-king
When all the wood was brown,
But over me a lure was cast
That dragged my proud heart down—
Ah me!
That dragged my proud heart down.

One came tracking the mighty boar
When all the wood was white,
But from my wound the red drops fell
That guided him that night—
Ah me!
That guided him that night.

III. THE PRINCE

My heart it was a cup of gold
That at his lip did long to lie,
But he hath drunk the red wine down,
And tossed the goblet by.

My heart it was a floating bird
That through the world did wander free,
But he hath locked it in a cage,
And lost the silver key.

My heart it was a white, white rose
That bloomed upon a broken bough,
He did but wear it for an hour,
And it is withered now.

THE LITTLE DEAD CHILD

WHEN all but her were sleeping fast,
And the night was nearly fled,
The little dead child came up the stair
And stood by his mother's bed.

"Ah, God!" she cried, "the nights are three,
And yet I have not slept!"
The little dead child he sat him down,
And sank his head, and wept.

.

"And is it thou, my little dead child,
Come in from out the storm?
Ah, lie thou back against my heart,
And I will keep thee warm!"

*That is long ago, mother,
Long and long ago!
Shall I grow warm who lay three nights
Beneath the winter snow?*

.

"Hast thou not heard the old nurse weep?
She sings to us no more;
And thy brothers leave the broken toys
And whisper in the door."

THE LITTLE DEAD CHILD

*That is far away, mother,
Far and far away!
Above my head the stone is white,
My hands forget to play.*

.

“What wilt thou then, my little dead child,
Since here thou may'st not lie?
Ah, me! that snow should be thy sheet,
And winds thy lullaby!”

*Down within my grave, mother,
I heard, I know not how,
“Go up to God, thou little child,
Go up and meet him now!”*

*That is far to fare, mother,
Far and far to fare!
I come for thee to carry me
The way from here to there.*

“O hold thy peace, my little dead child,
My heart will break in me!
Thy way to God thou must go alone,
I may not carry thee!”

.

THE LITTLE DEAD CHILD

The cock crew out the early dawn
Ere she could stay her moan ;
She heard the cry of a little child,
Upon his way alone.

AT PARTING

OH, all too well beloved, at last I know
That for us two the parting of the ways
Has come, and brought the ending of sweet days.
Bid me good-bye, and loose my hand, and go.
To-day's fair peak we ran to climb, and low
Before us, glowing in our last sun's rays,
The path slopes down, nor undivided stays;
The path slopes down, but separate and slow.

Henceforward you and I alone must fare.
Nay, look not all so sad! Was ever done
A deed to merit all that we have won
Of joy? I tell you, there are those whose prayer
Is nightly on their knees that they might bear
Our shadow, could they but have known our sun!

THE NIXY

THEY brought her honey and milk,
They brought her curds and wine,
“But oh!” she cried, “for the river side,
And the rushes that were mine!”

They robed her body with silk,
They filled her lap with gold,
“But oh!” she prayed, “for the mossy shade,
And the green depths, pure and cold!”

They kissed her ankles for love,
They worshiped at her eyes,
“But oh!” she moaned, “for the flood, deep-toned,
And the sweeping spray that flies!”

They draped her chamber with black,
They wept there at her bier,
But her glad soul fled when her heart was dead,
And flowed with the river clear.

A JAPANESE FAN

Is it so warm in old Japan?
Do flowers flaunt out such riot glare?
Hangs that soft, golden mist so low?
Ah me, ah me, to journey there!

Inked out against the yellow glow
One sharp peak rises, blackly bare;
A stately swan steers up the sky—
Ah me, ah me, to journey there!

And see her as she furls her fan!
Was ever lady half so fair?
She beckons to me with her eyes—
Ah me, ah me, to journey there!

Were ever feet so dainty small?
Was ever coiled such shining hair?
Her hands are like curled lily-buds—
Ah me, ah me, to journey there!

Fan-pictured, dear Japan, thy calm
Fills us of West with dull despair!
(The palm-leaves sift the sunlight through)
Ah me, ah me, to journey there!

TWO SONNETS FROM THE HEBREW

I. THE PREPARATION

“And he said, I will not destroy it for the ten’s sake.”

Look back and see this brooding tenderness!
Ye wait till Bethlehem? Nay then, not I!
Under the law doth Israel ever sigh?
Is there no mercy till the great redress?
See now, amid the nameless wickedness
Love dreadeth lest one soul of his should die,
Spareth and faltereth and passeth by,
Soft’ning the law to ease a son’s distress.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?
Aye, child, and more! thou hast not learned to spell
Love’s first great letter: centuries of pain
Still leave him terrible in thy scared sight
Who quencheth with his tears the fires of hell,
And yearneth o’er the cities of the Plain!

II. THE INCARNATION

“Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee!”

“**S**PEAK thou for us: with God we will not speak!”
Ye will have prophet, yea, and saviour too,
And saint and creed and priest to worship through,
Whereat Love smiles and gives them, ye being weak.
And most ye clutch at her, that virgin meek
With cradling arms: ah, child of Love, but who
Curved her soft breast, and taught the dove to coo,
And sent the shepherd forth the lamb to seek?

Surely great wings are wrapped around our world!
And the one pulse that in us ebbs and flows
Leaps at her name, for she has understood:
In our hearts' lowest leaves her love is curled,
Unshrined, she yet hath comfort for all woes,
If not God's mother, still God's motherhood!

ODE: WRITTEN FOR THE TWENTY-SECOND OF
FEBRUARY

UPON the shore of God's unfinished years,
Waiting impatient while the slow mist clears,
The younger sister of the nations stands,
And shades her eyes with mighty, eager hands.

So great, so proud, so strong! with youthful scorn
She leaves behind her sisters elder born,
And stands before the parting of the ways,
Unburdened with their weight of yesterdays.

Hard eyes and restless hers, agleam for gain,
And peevish children struggle in her train;
Yet her broad brows have bloody laurels pressed,
And she hath nourished heroes at her breast.

Half scornful of her children of to-day,
She dreams how long ago and far away
Her firstborn brought across the new-found seas
Their mighty faith, long gone, alas, from these!

She sees them, where th' untrodden forest waves,
Building new homes upon their thick-set graves,
Raising new altars to a stern, high creed,
Training in fear of God their stalwart breed.

O D E

She hears them fling across the hostile sea
That cry that cheered her on to victory;
She feels again the thrill that shook her soul
When wondering nations watched her flag unroll.

She sees—and ah, her heart grows big with tears
From out the mists of those long-vanished years,—
She sees her best beloved come, her pride;
There stands again her hero at her side.

Her eyes are soft with love, and to her heart
There comes anew with sweet, resistless smart
Her long-forgotten motherhood, she turns,
And toward her children as of old she yearns.

“Oh, grown beyond my power to curb or stay,
Turn ye a moment from your sordid way,
Lift ye your restless, weary eyes on high,
This son your mother bore in days gone by!

“Ye will not see me old before my time!
Ye will not make me barren in my prime!
Help me to bear ye men again like these!
Make me the greatest land the great sun sees!”

Ashamed and dumb her summoned children stand,
And love with the old love their Mother-land.
Deep in their hearts her elder son is set:
Thinking on him, they cannot quite forget!

O D E

Before his gracious calm their fevered schemes
Awhile are gone, and flushed with the old dreams,
They see in him writ large the old, high aim,
They point, though backward, to one perfect fame!

THE DEATH SONG

“The island of Martinique will not, in all probability, be built up again.”

HEARKEN, my father the lowering Sky!
Hearken, my brother the heaving Sea!
Who but thy sister calls to thee?
I, the Mountain, make end and die.

Bridled was I and bitted sure?
Bridged with homes and with gardens chained?
God's tame beast to his uses trained?
Ye to go free, and I endure?

See, my father, I cloud like thee!
See, my brother, like thee I swell!
Ye league with death, but I rule all hell,
And the Lord of heaven shall shrink from me.

Once I groaned, and the scared wind sighed,
Twice I heaved, and the sick earth turned,
Thrice I spat out my blood that burned,
Roaring with torture, aflame with pride.

Down below me they swarmed and stirred,
Ants in an ant-hill, row on row.
“Haste!” I cried to them, “haste and go!”
Have I not warned? but they have not heard.

THE DEATH SONG

"Pains of the deep hold me in thrall,
World-old cancers that eat my heart,
Blood o' the earth—I feel it start—
Gone, get ye gone, or it floods you all!"

Living and breeding, still they smile,
Ants of the ant-hill, pygmy men,
"Pelée stirs? she will rest again;
Live and love me and dance awhile!"

.

Ha, my heart it is rent in twain!
Up and out in a fiery path
Sweeps a river of molten wrath,
Falls a torrent of scorching rain!

Ho, my brother, you boil and hiss!
Ho, my father, I hide your sun!
Up, at last, little ants, and run!
Shrivel and blanch at Pelée's kiss!

Hark! did I hear from below my hill
Rise and echo a puny din?
Through my thunder a wailing thin?
When I listened, the ants were still.

THE DEATH SONG

One throe more, and the sea is death,
Yet again, and the land is bare:
Brother, your glory is all to share—
I have outmurdered ye, breath for breath!

Lone I must lie in my stately doom,
Stark and still on my island bier:
Ashen silence shall wrap me here—
Pelée the Mountain makes her tomb!

SEVEN CHILD SONGS

I. DO YOU KNOW?

BEHIND the currant bushes, when the night was coming on,

There was such a funny whisper—do you know?
It made us shiver-shiver, and it made our hearts beat quick,
And we knew it was n't any good to carry out a stick,
But we did it just the same, or else you never would have gone—

Do you know?

Beyond the old syringa, when the stars were peeping out,

There was such a funny shadow—do you know?
And over in the flower-bed you had left your father's spade,
And you had to go and get it, and you said you were n't afraid,
But you told me afterward about the creeping Indian scout—

Do you know?

Beneath the kitchen window, when the moon was climbing high,

There was such a funny coldness—do you know?
No matter if 't was summer, it was cool just like a well,

DO YOU KNOW ?

And the reason was because a ghost—but when you
tried to tell,

I put my fingers in my ears, and how I used to cry!

Do you know?

II. THE SECRET PLAYMATE

WHEN I am playing underneath the tree,
I look around—and there he is with me!

Among the shadows of the boughs he stands,
And shakes the leaves at me with both his hands.

And then upon the mossy roots we lie,
And watch the leaves make pictures on the sky.

And then we swing and float from bough to bough—
And never fall? I can't remember now.

The games I play with him are always best,
And yet we cannot teach them to the rest.

For when the others come to join our play,
I look around—and he has slipped away!

They ask me if he speaks—I cannot tell;
But no one else can play with me so well.

III. LONELINESS

How can I play any longer with my doll?
You know she has lost her head.
And Mary's the one that used to mend her for me—
And Mary, you say, is dead.

Why do I leave the sand-heap all alone?
Because it has dried and spread.
And Mary's the one that always brought the water—
And Mary, you say, is dead.

More on the beach? Well, I think I know that, too!
And *you* are the one that said
That Mary and I should sleep in a room together—
And now you say Mary's dead.

No, I don't like the hotel—I'd be alone;
I'd cry in that great big bed:
And Mary and I played tent in the morning early—
And now Mary can't—she's dead.

Happier? no, not a bit! not a single bit!
Then why are your eyes so red?
And Mary's the one that never liked angel-stories—
And Mary's the one that's dead.

IV. DREAMS

ONE night I climbed a mountain all of snow,
A great black creature showed me where to go:
We went into a church with no one there,
And cried because the wind began to blow.

And then a King that wore a golden crown
Climbed up the spire and tried to help me down,
But I spread out my arms, and flew and flew,
And all the people watched us from the town.

They chased me through the streets, but I ran fast,
And got into a secret place at last.
I'd float down stairways, touching just my toes,
And laugh and mock at them as I went past.

And then we went to Cinderella's ball,
I had no shoes nor stockings on at all:
They smiled and pointed at me till I cried,
And woke up just as when you slip and fall.

V. THE SHADOW

IF you and I should join our hands
And go at night soft through the hall,
I wonder could we hope to catch
That shadow sliding from the wall?

He slips and slips and slips away,
I touched his arm—and he was gone!
I cannot see his face, can you?
What wall can that be painted on?

Because they say he is n't real,
They say he's just a flattened form;
But me, I don't believe it's true,
I touched his arm, and it was warm!

Right through the wall he slips and sinks:
The room behind, you know, is mine.
What can he want there in the dark?
He never makes a sound nor sign.

He never goes there in the day,
Only at night, right after tea,
And then I go to bed, you know,
And then he runs ahead of me.

THE SHADOW

If you will hold my hand quite close,
And creep along with me quite still;
We'll make a sudden jump—but no!
We'll touch him then—I know we will!

VI. HEAVEN

SHE says that when we all have died
We'll walk in white there (then she cried)
All free from sorrow, sin, and care—
But I'm not sure I'd like it there.

She cannot tell me what we'll do,
I could n't sing the whole day through:
The angels might not care to play,
Or else I might n't like their way.

I never loved my Uncle Ned,
So I can't love him now he's dead.
He'd be the only one I know—
She says it's wicked to talk so.

I'd like to see how God would look,
I'd like to see that Judgment Book:
But pretty soon I'd want to be
Where the real people were, you see.

When people turn dead in a dream,
I wake up, and I scream and scream:
And since they're all dead there, you know,
I'm sure that I should feel just so!

VII. THE PEAR TREE

WE lived out under the pear tree,
We dined upon tarts and cream,
I married you there for ever,
But, dear, 't was only a dream!

We sailed away in the branches
To countries strange and new,
For we owned estates in Dreamland,
But, sweetheart, it is n't true!

We made a church in the pear tree,
Where the angels came to sing,
We stroked their wings—but, dearest,
You must n't believe a thing!

We cut our names in the tree trunk,
So the bark could never grow,
And the Dryad cried! But, my darling,
'T was none of it really so!

INSCRIPTIONS

FOR A CHILD'S PLATE

MY Child, when from this Plate you Eat,
Give Thanks to God, who Sends your Meat.
Beware you Show no Haste nor Greed,
To those who Serve pay Gentle Heed,
Spare out some Bread to Feed the Poor,
And you shall Never Want, be Sure.

FOR HIS CUP

WHEN drinking, Child, from out this Cup
To Ease your thirsty Pain,
Think how the Earth to God looks up
And Thanks Him for the Rain.

FOR HIS CHAIR

WHEN in this Chair you Rest, my Child,
Let all your Thoughts be Kind and Mild,
Your Face and Hands quite Neat:
Rise up until your Elders sit,
Seek not to Show a Saucy Wit,
Nor all you Hear Repeat.

FOR HIS BED

Go not to Sleep in this White Bed,
My Child, before your Prayers are Said.
Give Thanks to God for all your Joys,
For Mother, Home, and Friends and Toys.
Ask Pardon for the Sins you've Done,
Then Shut your Eyes until the Sun:
Your Dream shall be a happy one.

THE WANDERERS

THE PRINCE A MAN-AT-ARMS A GYPSY

Scene: The Edge of the Forest

THE PRINCE

So then, I am crowned to-morrow?

MAN-AT-ARMS

Yes, my lord.

PRINCE

How fleet the time runs by! But yesterday
I played in the fountain with the great white hound.
My old, old nurse that died . . .

But all is changed.

I am a man now?

MAN-AT-ARMS

So it seems, my lord.

PRINCE

And I am king to-morrow.

Ah, dear saints!

This is the saddest day of all my life.
Farewell, farewell, sweet Yesterday! Farewell,
Thou once so sweet To-morrow! Thou for me
Shalt no more beckon down the widening road
That flows through all the forests and the fields,

THE WANDERERS

That flowers into the sunset and the sea!
Henceforth companioned by the same To-day,
The dull, cramped state, the tired formality,
False thoughtfulness and feigned remembrances,
I yoke my life to one recurring task,
No sooner done than all's to do again!
I would I were a child with one white hound
That lapped the fountain. . . .

Wherefore do you sigh?

Why are you sad? You need not be a king.

MAN-AT-ARMS

My lord, I love you.

PRINCE

I know it. Oh, my friend,
Listen, and I will tell you. Only you
Are friendly-souled in all this cruel court;
And that is strange, for you must ever dog me,
That I go not afield nor roam the woods.
Why may I not?

MAN-AT-ARMS

My lord, it is forbidden.

PRINCE

But why?

MAN-AT-ARMS

I know not. What would you tell me, sir?

THE WANDERERS

PRINCE

Why, this.

Last night I leaned far out the tower
To catch the smell o' the woods and hear the birds
Quiet their young to sleep, and watch the stars
Slip one by one to sight, and feel the wind,
That blows so soft at night, come floating by.
And on my ear there fell a sudden song:
So throstle-sweet it was, so faëry-gay,
My heart stood still to hear it. It rose high,
And all my soul rose with it; it sank low—
My cheeks were wet with tears.

I tell you, friend,
My years slipped from me like a mantle dropped.
I felt the wonderful, the wild, sweet dreams
That blessed those nights when I, a little boy,
Trembled a moment on the forest brink,
Then flung myself into its dusky arms,
Swung in the billowy boughs and pressed the moss,
Drank from the pool beside the spotted deer,
And at the murmurous swaying of the pines
Wept in my childish sleep for joy too great.
(*The Gypsy song is heard.*)

*Oh, the goodwife turns the wheel at home,
And the bird will keep her nest,
But it's ah me! for the world's to see
Or ever my heart have rest!*

THE WANDERERS

PRINCE

There, there! You heard it? Ah, unhappy prince!
For me the green earth spreads her fields in vain,
The forest pleads in vain with dusky arms:
I shall die caged.

Ah, do you see him there?

MAN-AT-ARMS

See whom, my lord?

PRINCE

The stranger in the wood.
How brown, how bright! How gallantly it swings,
That tattered robe! And see his gleaming chain,
His scarlet berries!

Nay, I will not go!
Nay, if you touch me I shall kill you! Nay,
I will speak with him if I die for it!
He turns his eye upon me—

Ah, dear saints!

I mind me of my mother suddenly,
That died for sorrow when she brought me forth
To chain me to a throne. Ah me, ah me!
When did my mother die?

MAN-AT-ARMS

The queen, my lord,
Left life behind her at the early dawn,
Just as the spring was coming on.

THE WANDERERS

PRINCE

And where?

MAN-AT-ARMS

How can I tell?

PRINCE

I know you will tell true.

MAN-AT-ARMS

My lord, the queen, your mother, grew distraught,
And ere her time was come she crept at night
Between her watchers while they drowsed, and found
A glade among the hills that spring had kissed,
And underneath green boughs she laid her down.

PRINCE

And I was born there?

MAN-AT-ARMS

Aye, my lord. Below
The first faint budding bough we found you there.

PRINCE

You should have told me this.

See, he comes near!

(*To the Gypsy.*) God save you, sir!

GYPSY

I lie within his hand.

PRINCE

Where go you?

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THE WANDERERS

GYPSY

Where the cool brown river runs,
Over the shining pebbles, through deep pools
The setting sun turns first to molten gold,
Then hues with pigeons' breasts, purple and pink,
Then fills with inky shadows where the moon
Plunges at midnight.

'Neath the glimmering stacks
Below the waiting stars I dream good dreams,
And catch the sky's faint blush, and bathe in the brook,
And tread the firm green grass and follow the clouds,
Till drowsy noon.

I sing before her door,
And the farmer's wife brings honey to me, and bread
And milk beneath the pink, sweet apple-boughs.

PRINCE

Will you not sing to me?

(Gypsy sings.)

*The king he wooed the Gypsy maid
And kissed her to the throne;
She fell asleep, but blood runs deep,
And the forest claims its own!*

MAN-AT-ARMS

Leave us, I say!

PRINCE

You shall not threaten him!

THE WANDERERS

MAN-AT-ARMS

Go, or I strike!

PRINCE

Where is your love for me?

MAN-AT-ARMS

Sir, if my care for you had matched my love
We two had long ago been far from here.
With every moment's lingering, my lord,
I move one step the nearer to my death:
Will you not come?

PRINCE

I cannot.

MAN-AT-ARMS

Then for me
Life is not long, it seems. I pray you, sir,
Remember always that I loved you well!

(Gypsy sings.)

*Ah, vain for him the diadem,
Heavy the scepter's load,
For he was lord o' the windy wood,
And prince o' the winding road!*

PRINCE

I come, I come!

Nay, weep not so, good friend!

THE WANDERERS

This is no fault of thine; for you and me
God's plan is kindly. Never did I loose
The hare entrapped or set the song-bird free
But I had faith that He would serve me so!
Come with me: little love have they for us
In that hot, weary glitter of the court.
Hast thou not seen the new queen grudge at me
And nurse her son to scorn me?

Let them reign!

We'll make a dearer court.

The trees shall bend

And bow to us, but not with flattery;
The little leaves shall whisper, but their lisp
Is clean of lies and slander; the sleek deer
Shall lead their tender fawns to kiss our hand,
Nor plot us evil with the soft caress;
The wind and rain shall be our councilors,
Nor urge us to do war, nor press the poor,
Nor waste our souls in bitter rivalries,
Nor match a petty kingdom with great powers
That smile at us for folly.

Let them reign!

(*Gypsy sings.*)

*And it's we will fling the world away,
And reap where God has sowed,
And we'll roam for ay the windy wood,
And wander the winding road!*

THE WANDERERS

PRINCE

Friend, must I go alone?

MAN-AT-ARMS

My lord, these hands
Lifted you first from where you lay and smiled
Beside the dead queen 'neath the hawthorn-tree.
I walked beside the horse when first you rode,
I set the hawk upon your little arm,
I have lain years before your door at night.
The death I stay to meet were not so hard
As life without you.

PRINCE

Will you follow me?

MAN-AT-ARMS

To the death, my lord!

PRINCE

Why, then, good friends, your hands!
We three are bound for the woods: God needs some
souls
To love the world as he made it.

Come with me!

(They enter the forest; the Gypsy song is heard.)

THE WANDERERS

*Oh, the goodwife turns the wheel at home,
And the bird will keep her nest,
But it's ah me! for the world's to see
Or ever my heart have rest!*

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